

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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P 151423Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5863

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, APER, SY, US

SUBJ: FOREIGN MINISTER REQUESTS REDUCTION IN U.S. DIPLOMATIC
PERSONNEL

1. SUMMARY. FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM, THROUGH HIS
CHIEF OF PROTOCOL, HAS REQUESTED THAT EMBASSY REDUCE
ITS DIPLOMATIC STAFF TO "20(BUT NO MORE THAN 2-"
AND CEASE USING TITLE OF ASSISTANT ATTACHE. END
SUMMARY

2. FOREIGN MINISTRY CHIEF OF PROTOCOL, NAHLAWI,
CALLED IN AMBASSADOR JAN 12 TO DELIVER FOLLOWING
MESSAGE: FONMIN KHADDAM CONSIDERS NUMBER OF U.S.
DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL ASSIGNED TO SYRIA EXCESSIVE
IN TERMS OF CURRENT STATE OF SYRIAN-U.S. RELATIONS.
MINISTER WISHES U.S. DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL REDUCED
TO "20 BUT NO MORE THAN 22" OVER NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS.
HE NOTED THAT U.S. MISSION HAD BEEN 18 WHEN JULY
1975 LIST WAS PUBLISHED AND COULD NOT UNDERSTAND
WHY LIST HAD INCREASED SO SHARPLY IN INTERIM.

3. SECOND ISSUE RAISED BY NAHLAWI WAS USE BY
EMBASSY AND SEVERAL OTHER EMBASSIES IN DAMASCUS
(E.G., SAUDI ARABIA AND WEST GERMANY) OF "UNACCEPTABLE"
TITLE OF ASSISTANT ATTACHE. NAHLAWI SAID MINISTRY
WOULD SHORTLY ISSUE CIRCULAR NOTE REQUIRING EMBASSIES
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TO CEASE USING ASSISTANT ATTACHE TITLE. PERSONNEL

CURRENTLY ON DIPLOMATIC LIST COULD RETAIN TITLE UNTIL JUNE 1976 WHEN NEW DIPLOMATIC LIST WOULD BE PUBLISHED. IN NEW LIST, ASSISTANT ATTACHE TITLE WOULD NOT BE PERMITTED.

4. AMBASSADOR NOTED IN REPLY HIS CONCERN SINCE RESUMPTION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS TO HAVE FULL IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES FOR AS MANY USG PERSONNEL IN SYRIA AS POSSIBLE IN VIEW OF UNCERTAINTIES OF CURRENT SITUATION. HE BRIEFED NAHLAWI ON STATUS NEGOTIATION U.S.-SYRIAN ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE AGREEMENT WHICH WE EXPECTED WOULD INCLUDE PROVISION FOR SATISFACTORY IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES FOR AID PERSONNEL. IF SATISFACTORY AGREEMENT WITH MINISTRY OF PLANNING ON THIS ISSUE COULD BE REACHED, IT AT WOULD ASSIST EMBASSY IN MEETING FONMIN DESIRED LEVEL OF DIPLOMATIC STAFF. PENDING CONCLUSION OF AGREEMENT, HOWEVER, HE INSISTED ON HAVING AID PERSONNEL ACCREDITED AS MEMBERS OF U.S. DIPLOMATIC MISSION. AMBASSADOR PROMISED TO BE BACK IN TOUCH WITH NAHLAWI SOON ON THIS QUESTION.

5. AMBASSADOR NOTED THAT AMERICAN AND SYRIAN PROTOCOL APPEARED TO BE IN CONFLICT IN GRANTING TITLE ASSISTANT ATTACHE. HE THANKED NAHLAWI FOR RAISING SUBJECT WITH US PRIOR TO ISSUANCE SYRIAN CIRCULAR NOTE.

6. COMMENT: CONCERN OVER SIZE OF U.S. DIPLOMATIC MISSION IN SYRIA HAS BEEN BUILDING FOR SOME TIME. WITH 26 U.S. MISSION PERSONNEL CURRENTLY ACCREDITED AS DIPLOMATS TO SARG WE HAVE BECOME SECOND ONLY TO SOVIET UNION IN TERMS OF OFFICIAL FOREIGN DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE IN DAMASCUS AND THIS FACT HAS NOT ESCAPED ATTENTION OF EITHER MY DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES OR SYRIAN OFFICIALS. WE WILL TRY TO TEMPORIZE ON THIS ISSUE WHILE AID BILATERAL AGREEMENT IS PENDING BUT IT WILL HAVE TO BE FACED IN NEAR FUTURE, PARTICULARLY IF STAFF INCREASES ARE APPROVED. WE CURRENTLY HAVE FIVE AID PERSONNEL ON DIPLOMATIC LIST WITH FIVE ADDITIONAL POSITIONS TO BE FILLED. WOULD EXPECT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AID REP RAMSEY TO BE ACCREDITED IN ANY CASE BUT OTHERS TO COME UNDER AID BILATERAL WHEN CONCLUDED. PROBLEM WILL BE PRESENTED IF THEY ARRIVE, AS EXPECTED, BEFORE BILATERAL ENTERS INTO EFFECT.

7. ON ASSISTANT ATTACHE TITLES, I WOULD LIKE TO GO BACK TO NAHLAWI AS SOON AS I CAN WITH FULL INFORMATION ON U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL USAGE OF THIS TITLE. IT

MAY BE THAT SYRIAN MEASURE CAN BE AVERTED BY PROMPT
ACTION. WOULD THEREFORE APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT'S
GUIDANCE BOTH ON USE OF ASSISTANT ATTACHE TITLE AND
ON ALTERNATIVES WHICH MAY BE AVAILABLE IF SARG PERSISTS
IN ITS INTENDED ACTION. EMBASSY CURRENTLY HAS FIVE
ASSISTANT ATTACHES: FSSO-6S BARBER AND MCKINNEY
AND FSSO-7S SATCHER, DORSEY AND MILLER. FSSO-7
PUHEK HAS JUST ARRIVED AND WE HAVE HELD UP NOTIFICATION
TO FOREIGN MINISTRY PENDING APPROVAL OF ASSISTANT
ATTACHE TITLE FOR HER.
MURPHY

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